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Solving Conflict in Academic Contexts: a Comparison of U.S. and Taiwanese College Students

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SOLVING CONFLICT IN ACADEMIC CONTEXTS: A COMPARISON OF US AND TAIWANESE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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In today's globalized society with intense interaction between and among cultures, cross cultural understanding is becoming of crucial importance for successful communication. Whenever there is communication among people from different cultures, disagreement, argument and interpersonal conflict may occur. For this reason, the study of cultural differences in conflict resolution is of great value to society at large. Yet, the number of studies that have examined conflict resolution approaches across cultures is insufficient.

This study sought to contribute to this area of research by investigating conflict resolution strategies employed by US and Taiwanese college students in academic contexts and the motives underlying participants' preferences for certain strategies. The US and Taiwanese samples were chosen as representative of two different cultures, individualistic and collectivistic, respectively. Specifically, 15 US college students and 15 Taiwanese college students were selected from a US college campus. The Taiwanese group included students who have spent less than one year in the United States.

The instrument consisted of a written questionnaire with four conflict scenarios and an audio-recorded interview with six randomly selected participants from both

groups. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, Discriminant Function Analysis and content analysis. Both the descriptive and the Discriminant Function analyses showed that the US college students were significantly associated with the use of direct or avoidance conflict resolution approaches, while the Taiwanese college students showed a significantly higher inclination towards an indirect approach often involving a third party. The qualitative results revealed that the motives underlying the participants' responses stemmed from both cultural and personal factors, such as individualistic and collectivistic values as well as family and religious background.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are not isolated entities; language reflects culture and culture influences and shapes language. Therefore, whenever there is communication among people from different cultures, disagreement, argument and interpersonal conflict may occur. Both Triandis (2000) and Ting-Toomey (1994) have mentioned that miscommunication, misunderstanding and conflict are often caused by cultural differences. In addition, a number of researchers have also indicated that it is inevitable for individuals in every culture to need others and to be needed in their lives; and for this reason they aspire to bring harmony and well-being in their relationships (e.g. Bowlby, 1982; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Hinde, 1981; Lewis, 1982; Sarason & Sarason, 1985; Weiss, 1974). Therefore, whenever people are in conflict, some of them will try to face the problem directly and solve it, while others would rather avoid it in order not to make the problem worse.

A number of studies have pointed out that cultural characteristics take a very important role in how people communicate and behave when in conflict, and how they manage conflict (Knutson, Hwang, & Deng, 2000; Ting-Toomey, 1998). In reference to cultural differences between Asian and Western cultures, Knutson (1994) wrote: "When compared to other populations, the differences between Asian and Western cultures are maximal; that is, the commonality among variables is small and a great number of components differ conspicuously" (p. 2). As a matter of fact, in the past few decades, contrast between the West and the East on cultural issues has become of interest to

researchers. Thus, the two cultures have been identified as "individualistic" and "collectivistic" respectively (e.g., Geertz, 1974/1984; Hofstede, 1980; Miller, 1988; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). To be more specific, on a hypothesized scale with "individualism" and "collectivism" at the two ends, most western cultures will be relatively close to "individualism" while most eastern cultures will be on the "collectivism" end (Kagitçibasi, 1996, 1997). As described in Kitayama et al. (1997), "Western cultures are organized according to meanings and practices that promote the independence and autonomy of a self that is separate from other selves, – in contrast, many Asian cultures do not highlight the explicit separation of each individual, and they are organized according to meanings and practices that promote the fundamental connectedness among individuals" (p. 1247). Because of the fundamental differences between these two cultures, their ways of conflict management are different to some degree.

Since conflict resolution strategies and practices vary according to gender, culture, social status, situation, and others, this paper aims to focus on conflict in an academic context between two different cultures, the US, representing an individualistic culture, and the Taiwanese, representing a collectivistic culture. In the following section, an illustration of the concept of culture and the concept of conflict are provided.

1.1 Definitions of Culture

Human beings around the world share common characteristics, but also have unique features that are often acquired under the influence of their culture. According to

Naylor (1997), all human beings are fundamentally the same, but culture makes them different and distinguishes them from other groups by creating and developing their "own version of culture" to meet their needs, desires and goals. In other words, culture serves as an element that helps humans to identify and define themselves. Therefore, Naylor (1997) defined culture as "the learned way (or ways) of belief, behavior, and the products of these (both physically and socially) that is shared (at least to some degree) within human groups and serves to distinguish that culture group from another learning different beliefs and behaviors" (p. 1). Ting-Toomey (1999) also made a similar definition of culture. She defined culture as "a learned meaning system that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, and symbols that are passed on from one generation to the next and are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community" (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p. 10).

Since culture varies in different societies, a dimension of cultural context ranging from high to low was introduced by Hall (1976). High cultural context was associated with high cultural demands and constraints; yet, low cultural context was regarded as low cultural demands and constraints (Ting-Toomey, 1985). People from the high-context culture such as Asian cultures are more likely to pay attention to their environment and surroundings and less likely to take verbal behaviors for granted (Porter & Samovar, 1991). Therefore, people from the high-context culture will expect others to understand their nonverbal messages. On the other hand, in the low-context culture such as North America and Western Europe, people mainly rely on verbal behaviors as their information source and communication ways (Porter & Samovar, 1991). Therefore, in

the low-context culture, people will be encouraged to share and deliver information verbally.

1.2 Definitions of Conflict

1.2.1 General Definition

In light of the definition of the Oxford Online Dictionary[1], the term conflict is defined as "a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument." In fact, people from different cultures have different definitions of conflict. For instance, in France, conflict is associated with "a war – an encounter between contrary elements that oppose each other and 'to oppose' is a strong term, conveying powerful antagonism" (Faure, 1995, pp. 41-42). In the context of China, conflict is seen as any unpleasant dispute, serious fighting and "contradictory struggle." In other words, any types of unharmonious situations in Chinese culture will initiate a conflict (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). For the Anglo-Saxons, conflict is defined diversely as any disagreement and undesired conditions preventing an individual from reaching one's goals (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2000; Lulofs & Cahn, 2000).

1.2.2 Intercultural Conflict

In contemporary society, social interactions and communication among people from different cultures are very common. Since conflict is part of human communication, it is inevitable between two or more cultures. Wilmot and Hocker (2001) defined conflict as "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive

[1] This resource offers three entries. I chose the definition that best fits my research problem.

incompatible goals, scare resources and interference from others in achieving their goals" (p. 41). Also, according to Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001), conflict, especially intercultural conflict, is defined as "the experience of emotional frustration in conjunction with perceived incompatibility of values, norms, face orientations, goals, scarce resources, processes, and/or outcomes between a minimum of two parties from two different cultural communities in an interactive situation" (p. 17). Because cultural values are often the reason for the initiation of an intercultural conflict, they could also be used to determine how to end an intercultural conflict. Therefore, in order to effectively manage intercultural conflict, it is important to understand that there are differences in vales. As Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin and Nishida (1991) have pointed out, "for oftentimes, it is not the content conflict that creates tensions or frictions, rather, it is the cultural style level that creates uncertainty and anxiety in the conflict encounter situation" (p. 276).

In light of this, many sources (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hofstede, 1980; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis, 1988) have mentioned that among the different behaviors in cross-cultural conflict styles around the world, individualism and collectivism seem as the two most common and fundamental cultural frameworks.

1.2.2.1 Individualistic Cultures

Individualistic cultures refer to those cultures which emphasize individual values over others' values, and treat the individual as an independent identity. That is to say,

people from individualistic cultures are more likely to show more concern for themselves than for others and see self interests, goals and needs more important than others (Hofstede, 1980). Brett (2000) also mentions that in such a society, individual accomplishments are highly encouraged and rewarded. Hofstede (1980) claims that people from individualistic cultures are motivated to take care of themselves and a selected few. In addition, competition is encouraged in individualistic societies. According to Thomas and Kilmann (1974), competing stands for "standing up for your rights" in attempting to achieve one's interest where consideration for others is not important. Brett (2000) explained that individualistic cultures because of their strong self set high goals for themselves and reject acceptable alternative agreements of meeting their needs.

In short, there is a tendency for people from individualistic cultures to focus on the *I* (Yang, 1981). Therefore, if conflicts arise in individualistic societies, people have a preference for strongly expressing their personal viewpoints and opinions (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). For this reason, the ideal way for them to resolve conflict situations is to speak up. In terms of countries which are considered individualistic cultures, research done by Hofstede (1991) and Triandis (1995) found that individualistic cultures are mostly found in northern and western regions of Europe and North America.

1.2.2.2 Collectivistic Cultures

In collectivistic cultures, people put more emphasis on group identity. More precisely, people from collectivistic cultures see the needs and rights of the group over

the needs and rights of every individual and tend to be more interdependent (Hofstede, 1980). Brett (2000) has also mentioned that to sacrifice individual good for greater interests is rewarding. Also, instead of accomplishing tasks, it is more important for people to maintain interpersonal harmony (Triandis et al., 1988b). In other words, competition is not highly recommended. Therefore, a great number of researchers pointed out that in order to have harmonious relationships with others, people from collectivistic cultures are motivated to pursue a closer relationship with others and to avoid conflict that may hurt the feelings of others (Ho & Chiu, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995).

Overall, there is a great tendency for people from collectivistic cultures to emphasize the *we* (Yang, 1981). If conflicts arise in collectivistic societies, people have a preference for recovering the relationship and healing the disappointment. In light of this, to maintain relational harmony, avoidance is one of the ideal ways to manage conflicts for people from collectivistic cultures (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Societies that have been identified as collectivistic include Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Central and South America, and the Pacific Islands (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1995).

Overall, conflict is defined differently based on different cultures. Also, since a conflict could emerge in a variety of situations, this study delimits the research area to conflict in an academic setting. Specifically, conflict in this study was defined as an academic situation in which disagreement, argument and opposing ideas or feelings occur between two people or among a group of people.

1.3 Conflict Resolution Strategies

There is no doubt that people from different cultures normally react to conflict differently. Chen and Starosta (1997, 1998) indicated that "cultural context," "language differences," and "thinking patterns" significantly influence people's attitudes toward conflict and how they manage conflict. Numerous researchers have pointed out that regarding "language differences," people from a culture in which direct communication is highly valued tend to resolve conflict with confrontational strategies. On the contrary, people from a culture sensitive to indirect communication tend to resolve conflict with a more harmonious approach, such as being silent and avoiding saying irritating words since it is believed that keeping a good relationship is very important.

Brown and Levinson (1978) and Goffman (1959) have raised another interesting issue, the concept of face which is associated with personal public image and reputation. They mention that people from various cultures want to project a public image that is approved by their culture. Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) define *face* in relation to "respect, honor, status, reputation, credibility, competence, network connection and relational obligation issues" (p. 36). People within a culture share the same idea of "*face*," either saving *face*, protecting *face* or losing *face*. However, the meaning of *face* varies across cultures (Condon, 1984; Ting-Toomey, 1988a). For example, for individualistic cultures, people tend to show consideration for their self image, i.e. to save and protect personal reputation. On the other hand, people from collectivistic cultures tend to care about their self-image and the image of others (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Previous research by Cocroft and Ting-Toomey (1994) and Oetzel and Ting-

Toomey (2003) concluded that since people from individualistic cultures attempt to save and protect their own *face*, it is therefore assumed that they will employ more integrating and dominating strategies while responding to conflict. Correspondingly, members of collectivistic cultures are predicted to utilize avoiding and accommodating resolution strategies when handling conflicts in order to maintain and restore the *face* of others.

To sum up, the issue of culture and conflict pertains to a variety of fields and can be examined in a variety of ways. This study delimits the scope of the investigation to solving conflict in US college settings by comparing US and Taiwanese college students' responses to attitudes and perceptions of conflict situations in classroom contexts. It also investigated the motives that govern students' approaches to dealing with academic conflict. In the following chapter, I will review the most pertinent studies in the area of conflict management.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents an overview of research that has explored cultural differences in dealing with conflict situations. The review has been organized according to the following subcategories: 1) Studies that have examined styles of managing interpersonal workplace conflicts; 2) Studies that have analyzed styles of managing interpersonal conflicts among students; 3) Studies that have probed styles of managing interpersonal conflicts in society at large. Accordingly, the literature review is presented in the order of the three categories described above.

2.1 Styles of managing interpersonal workplace conflicts

Studies that have investigated styles of managing interpersonal workplace conflicts have mainly focused on the differences and similarities of workplace conflict management among people in a higher position, mainly a manager position, and in two different cultures.

Lee and Rogan (1991) compared Korean (collectivistic culture) and US (individualistic culture) conflict behaviors in an organizational setting. This study aimed to test the hypothesis that non-confrontation and solution-orientation conflict strategies were favored by Korean subjects; while, the control approach was favored by the U.S. subjects in an organizational conflict. The researchers asked three questions: "(1) What is the effect of relational distance (ingroup vs. outgroup) on organizational conflict management behaviors in Korea and the U.S., respectively?; (2) What are the functions

of power relationships between members of an organization in determining their conflict management behavior in Korea and the U.S., respectively?; (3) What are the consequences of a subject's gender, age, and length of employment in the organization in determining one's conflict management behaviors?" (pp. 185-187).

The participants in this study were composed of 73 male and 17 female Koreans and 30 male and 60 female US subjects. They were asked to complete a questionnaire with organizational conflict management behaviors. The data were collected and analyzed with Putnam and Wilson's (1982) Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI). The overall findings showed that integrative conflict resolution strategies were preferred by Korean subjects, while competitive and directly confrontational conflict styles were favored by the U.S. subjects. The other finding was surprising, which showed that avoidance strategies were more associated with the U.S. group than with the Korean one. It was speculated that this result was due to the fact that the U.S. data were collected in the southern part of the country which was deemed more cohesive than other parts of the country.

The findings in relation to question two and three showed that the Korean subjects were less likely to employ the avoidance approach when in conflict with subordinates. On the other hand, for the U.S. subjects the social distance between the participants did not affect their preference for avoidance. Also, the data showed that the Korean group tended to use less non-confrontational strategies as they got older and had more power; whereas age and power had little affect among the U.S. group. Regarding gender, integration and control conflict resolution strategies rather than avoidance conflict

resolution strategies were preferred by the Korean male subjects more than the female; whereas avoidance conflict resolution strategies were favored by the U.S. males more than the females.

Another quantitative study done by Tinsley and Brett (2001) examined how people managed workplace conflict in the United States and Hong Kong. The main purpose of this study was to examine the hypotheses they proposed that certain cultural norms would affect people's responses toward conflict and to test how these cultural norms affect people from different cultural environment when dealing with conflict. The hypotheses they tested in the study were that US managers would be more authoritative and show less concern for collective interest than would Hong Kong Chinese managers. Also, Hong Kong Chinese managers would tend to leave decisions to higher management, whereas US managers would be more likely to solve problems than would their Hong Kong Chinese counterparts.

Ninety-four US managers (25% female and 75% male) and 120 Hong Kong Chinese managers (30% female and 70% male) participated in this study with an average age of 22 for Hong Kong Chinese group and 27 for the US group. All of them were business students at universities in the United States or Hong Kong with an average working experience of two years for the Hong Kong Chinese and five years for the US participants. All participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire which aimed to gather information about their cultural norms of conflict management. Additionally, they were paired up and given 40 minutes to solve a variety of conflict issues. During the discussion, they were audio-taped. The analysis involved a Multivariate Analysis of

Variance (MANOVA) with cultural group serving as an independent variable and conflict management norms as a dependent variable.

The results of this study supported the initial hypotheses that the Hong Kong Chinese managers would put emphasis on collective and authority concerns more than their US counterparts and that the Hong Kong Chinese managers would leave decisions unsolved more than their US counterparts. That is to say, the US managers were less likely to reach no conclusion outcome and were more likely to directly discuss workplace conflict.

Another quantitative study done by Knutson, Smith, Han and Hwang (2002) investigated the concept of rhetorical sensitivity with a group of Taiwanese Chinese subjects (collectivistic culture) and a group of US subjects (individualistic culture). The purpose of this study was to test the following hypotheses: "(H1) The U.S. sample is more likely to perceive a conflict in each scenario.; (H2) The Taiwanese sample will show a higher preference for the avoiding, intermediary, indirect, and obliging styles of conflict management, while the U.S. sample will show higher preference for the dominating style of conflict management.; (H3) The Taiwanese sample will display a significantly higher level of rhetorical sensitivity than the U.S. sample.; (H4) The Taiwanese sample will display a significantly higher level of rhetorical reflection than the U.S. sample.; (H5) The U.S. sample will display a significantly higher level of noble self than the Taiwanese sample.; (H6) Rhetorical reflectors are more likely to adopt an obliging approach to conflict management, rhetorical sensitives are more likely to adopt

an integrative approach to conflict management, and noble selves are more likely to adopt a dominating approach to conflict management" (pp. 152-153).

The subjects in this study were 178 students from California State University, Sacramento and 187students from Da Yeh University in central Taiwan. They were asked to respond to a questionnaire with three working environment conflict episodes, containing six potential resolution strategies and thirty-item RHETSEN2 scale (Eadie & Powell, 1991) to test rhetorical sensitivity. In the questionnaire, the respondents were first asked to decide whether the conflict episodes provided were considered as conflicts in their view, and then choose their preferred conflict strategies from the six provided.

The overall results of this study failed to support most of the hypotheses. Specifically, only the second and fourth hypotheses were supported in that the Taiwanese sample showed a higher level of rhetorical reflection and a higher preference for avoiding, face-to-face discussion of the matter, intermediary, indirect, and obliging styles of conflict management. The U.S. sample was more likely to deal with conflict through assertive and competitive styles. The researcher hypothesized that the reasons why the results did not support the expected outcomes were due to Western influence on the Taiwanese culture and the small sample size.

In a recent quantitative study by Tinsley and Weldon (2003), US mangers' and Chinese managers' responses to normative conflict were investigated. This study aimed to explore US and Chinese managers' intentions to shame the opponent and to look for revenge while in conflict. The hypotheses they proposed were that US managers would have a greater inclination to use revenge and direct communication to shame the

antagonist than Chinese, whereas Chinese would opt to shame the antagonist and teach a lesson through indirect communication.

The participants were 86 US managers with an average age of 27 (66% male) and 91 Chinese managers with an average age of 28 (61% male) from part-time MBA programs in the United States or Beijing, China. All respondents were asked to respond to a simulated situation with conflicts through a questionnaire. The following items were included: three items for seeking revenge, five items for inclination to shame, and two items for teaching a lesson. All items were measured on a two point scale.

The results showed that the US managers preferred to respond to conflict directly while the Chinese managers tended to choose indirect methods. However, the results did not support their hypothesis that the US managers were more likely to seek revenge when in conflict than their Chinese counterparts. The Chinese managers had a stronger intention to shame the antagonist or teach a moral lesson when in a conflict situation. These results supported previous research revealing that indirect management of conflict and shaming are more common in collectivistic cultures (Creighton, 1990; Crozier, 1998; Demos, 1996; Gilbert and McGuire, 1998), but were inconsistent with findings according to which collectivistic cultures had an inclination to seek harmony (Leung, 1997; Marcus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1988).

Brew and Cairns (2004) investigated how Anglos, representing an individualistic culture, and Chinese, representing a collectivistic culture handled a conflict in a workplace setting involving status and face-concerns. The participants were university students with work experiences, including 163 Anglo-Australian (81 males and 82

females) and 133 East Asian ethnic Chinese university students (66 males, and 67 females). They were asked to complete a questionnaire about their preferences in conflict management including a 2 (face-concern types: self or other) x 3 (status: subordinate, co-worker or superior) design."

The major findings showed that the Anglos preferred control, solution-oriented and confrontational conflict resolution approaches more than the Chinese. Also, a more direct interaction was preferred by the Anglos when the conflict situations involved face-threat. However, the results revealed that a direct approach was used by both group members when their self-face was threatened and it was adopted in the subordinate condition more than in the superior condition. In the co-worker condition, the Chinese showed "cautiousness" with self-concern and other-concern, whereas the Anglos showed "directness" with self-concern and other-concern. Overall, passive (indirect) and solution-oriented (direct) strategies emerged in both the Anglo-Australian and Chinese data in view of status.

2.2 Styles of managing interpersonal conflicts among students

A second set of studies has probed students' preferences in response to conflict. These studies compared responses to conflict in an individualistic culture, i.e. the United States, and in collectivistic cultures such as China, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan. Also, these studies aimed to identify whether or not there were other factors such as cultural values and moral values affecting the participants' responses to conflict.

A quantitative study conducted by Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin and Nishida (1991) examined the conflict management of people from five different cultures. The purpose of this study was to test Ting-Toomey's (1988a) *face-negotiation* theory on conflict. More specifically, the relationships between conflict styles and face maintenance dimensions among five cultures (Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States) were examined. The sample pool consisted of 220 Euro-American (104 males and 116 females), 197 Japanese (69 males and 128 females), 117 Chinese (98 males and 19 females), 207 South Korean (147 males and 60 females), and 224 Taiwanese (84 males and 140 females). All subjects were of average college student age. They were asked to complete a questionnaire with hypothetical conflict situations in their native languages. The data were analyzed by multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) in which the independent variable was culture and the dependent variables were the five types of conflict resolution styles, including dominating, integrating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising.

The results revealed that in three collectivistic cultures, China, South Korea, and Taiwan, face-maintenance dimensions were influenced by culture. That is, people from collectivistic cultures showed more concern for others' face as compared to individualistic cultures. Also, the strategies of conflict management were influenced by culture. More specifically, the U.S. participants showed a higher preference for using a dominating approach than the Japanese and Korean participants. The Chinese and Taiwanese participants showed a higher preference for using obliging and avoiding

approaches than the U.S. participants. Overall, face-maintenance dimensions were regarded as predictors of conflict resolution strategies.

Chiu and Kosinski (1994) investigated whether cultural differences and values would influence subjects' behaviors in response to types of conflict resolution. Two sets of dependent variables were examined, value dimensions and conflict-handling behaviors. To measure value dimensions (integration, moral discipline, human-heartedness, and Confucian work dynamism), the data was collected via the Chinese Value Survey (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987) which included a 40-item Chinese questionnaire. An English version of the questionnaire was provided. Participants who were male graduate students majored in business in Hong Kong and the United States. They were asked to mark the importance of each item on a 9-point scale. Also, the study adopted the Thomas-Kilmann's Management-of-Difference Exercise (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974) in which five types of modes to resolve conflict (compromising, competitiveness, avoidance, collaborativeness, and accommodation) were provided to test the other dependent variable, conflict-handling behaviors.

The statistical analyses included discriminant function analysis and canonical correlation analysis. The results indicated that moral discipline was the only construct that significantly and meaningfully discriminated between the Hong Kong Chinese respondent group and the US respondent group. This finding indicated that Hong Kong Chinese graduate business students were more likely to be influenced by Chinese cultural values of living harmoniously with people. Among the five types of conflict resolution modes, avoidance had no importance in discriminating between the two sample groups.

Overall, the US graduate business students tended to resolve conflict in a more competitive, directive, assertive, and confrontational way; whereas, the Hong Kong Chinese graduate business students preferred a more collaborative and harmonious way.

Another related study of quantitative nature was conducted by Kozan and Ergin (1998) to examine the role of a third party in resolving conflict in a collectivistic culture and an individualistic culture. In other words, subjects' preferences for conflict resolution through mediation were investigated in two different countries, the United States representing an individualistic culture, and Turkey representing a collectivistic culture. The sample consisted of 60 Turkish students (26 females and 34 males) from a major university in Ankara, and 60 American university students (33 females and 27 males) in the northeastern United States.

The procedure involved having participants sit in a research room and letting them play a game with another partner sitting in a different room after the assistants' oral and written instruction. They were told that this study was to test the strategies people used in games. The assistants did not know the actual purpose of this study either. There were eight trials in the game. Also, they had options to communicate with their partners to make any deals after the fourth and sixth trial. The choices they made were then coded into three categories: "(a) direct contact (going to the other room and talking in person), (b) intermediary (sending a message through the assistant), and (c) no contact" (Kozan & Ergin, 1998, p. 532).

The researchers used the hierarchical log-linear model to analyze the data where the dependent variables were type of contact, i.e. direct, intermediary and no contact.

The independent variables included country, experimental condition as well as gender. The chi-square results revealed that the independent variable country had a significant effect on the type of contact (direct, intermediary and no contact). That is to say, the Turkish respondent group showed a stronger tendency toward intermediaries and was less likely to make direct contact when compared to the US samples. Hence, it was concluded that people in a more collectivistic culture preferred to use a third party in conflict resolutions. However, both Turkish and US male samples showed no differences in terms of direct contact.

Leung, Au, Fernández-Dols, and Iwawaki (1992) explored preferred conflict resolution strategies in two collectivistic cultures, Japan and Spain. The subjects were 116 Japanese (58 males and 58 females) and 59 Spanish (30 males and 29 females) college students. They were asked to respond to a scenario set in a college dormitory with eight responses provided. They used a seven-point scale to identify their preferences for each of the responses provided and then rated each of the procedures on a seven-point scale. Eventually, six seven-point scales were included to measure "valences associated with expectancies of process control (e.g. how important it is for you to have control over the development of the quarrel), and expectancies of animosity reduction (e.g. how important it is for you to be able to reduce the intensity of the conflict)" (p. 201).

The results showed that Japanese participants were more likely to deal with conflict with mediation and arbitration than their Spanish counterparts. Therefore, the Japanese subjects needed to involve a third party help when in conflict. In addition,

comparing the two samples, they found out that both groups preferred harmony-enhancing strategies such as negotiating and complying and were less likely to employ threatening, accusing, and ignoring which were seen as confrontational.

In a more recent mixed research design including quantitative and qualitative methods, Hodis (2005) studied how US college students and Taiwanese college students dealt with conflict in different situations. She questioned whether or not people from the United States were more likely to select direct strategies in response to conflicts than people from Taiwan. Also, the differences among the strategies adopted by the US and Taiwanese males and females were examined.

The informants were 20 volunteers around the campus of a university in the United States, including 10 US students (5 males and 5 females) and 10 Taiwanese students (5 males and 5 females) of age ranging from 20 to 30 years old. The Taiwanese participants were limited to those who had stayed in the United States less than half a year. Hodis (2005) utilized a written questionnaire including three scenarios with different settings and an audio-recorded interview to collect the data. The interview focused on their personal experience related to dealing with conflict and their responses to the questionnaire. The data were analyzed through t-tests and content analysis.

The statistical analyses revealed that there was a significant difference among people from the United States and Taiwan in the way they responded to conflict. The results of the interview data and the questionnaire data were quite similar and showed that the US students preferred to solve any conflict they were involved in more often than did the Taiwanese students. This finding suggested that the US college students were

more direct than their Taiwanese counterparts were. On the contrary, the Taiwanese college students preferred avoiding strategies more than did the US college students. Also, the Taiwanese male informants preferred less direct strategies than the US male informants. However, there was no significant difference between the US and Taiwanese female groups. When comparing US males and females, the results showed that males were less likely to choose a direct method to respond to conflict than their female counterparts. This finding coincided with the comparison of Taiwanese males and females. That is, regardless of nationality, females tended to be more direct than their male counterparts.

2.3 Styles of managing interpersonal conflicts in society at large

Studies that have explored styles of managing interpersonal conflicts in general have focused on the similarities and differences of conflict resolution strategies between two different cultures, one of them being individualistic culture and the other being collectivistic culture. Some also examined the differences and similarities within a culture to probe any other factors which might influence conflict resolution styles.

Takahashi, Ohara, Antonucci, and Akiyama (2002) conducted a study, aiming to compare the concepts of individualistic culture and collectivistic culture. That is, whether any similarities and differences existed among the individualistic cultures and collectivistic cultures. Three propositions were proposed for examination: "(1) People in individualistic cultures will be more independent in social relationships than people in collectivistic cultures.; (2) People in individualistic cultures do not have a strong desire to

maintain harmonious relationships with other members.; (3) People in individualistic cultures are not integrated into "ingroups", especially into a family" (p. 454). The U.S. and Japan were the two countries chosen for this study and represented an individualistic and a collectivistic culture, respectively. The sample consisted of 1479 US participants with age ranging from 13 to 93 years old, and 1637 Japanese participants with age ranging from 13 to 92 years old. All of the respondents were interviewed face-to-face by professional interviewers who adopted a structured questionnaire and various assessment instruments. The data were measured by six items from the Affective Relationships Scale (ARS), developed by Takahashi in an earlier study (Takahashi, 1974, 1990; Takahashi & Sakamoto, 2000) and examined through univariate analyses.

The findings were partially consistent with most of the previous tests of the hypotheses. First of all, the results showed that the US participants had higher mean scores of positive relationships than their Japanese counterparts; which implied that Americans also had a need to integrate with others. Second, the results revealed that those who were emotionally interdependent were not necessarily associated with the preference for maintaining harmonious relationships. Instead, they only kept harmonious relationships with anyone they liked. Proposition three was not supported. The researchers suggested that there was a need to examine a similar aspect from a different side of the framework. That is, instead of the tendency to be associated with others, the tendency to be independent from others could be taken into consideration as well.

A qualitative study done by Jabs (2005) explored people's conflict management styles in North Eastern Uganda which is a collectivistic cultural environment. The aim of

this study was to investigate the different interpersonal conflict response styles of literate and non-literate[2] Karimojong - a tribe in Northeast corner of Uganda. Respondent groups were those Karimojong who were and were not able to read and write.

To collect the data, the members of Bokora Zonal Integrated Development Project (BOZIDEP) informed the community that a meeting would be held. There were mainly two focus groups in the study: men and women. Instead of having the two focus groups completing the questionnaire with set or hypothetical conflict situations, data was collected orally and literally by open-ended stories regarding individual conflict experiences and responses. Jabs collected 41 oral conflict stories and 41 written conflict stories. Of those, there were 31 oral stories concerning interpersonal conflicts and 29 written stories related to interpersonal conflicts. The oral stories were about conflicts with family members and the written stories involved friends or colleagues.

Jabs (2005) analyzed those conflict stories in three ways. First of all, he used Excel spreadsheets to summarize the demographic information of the people of the community as well as the causes and the outcomes of the stories. Next, the conflict stories were categorized into different themes and the patterns of responses were also examined. Finally, the styles of the responses were coded based on the steps they occurred.

The overall findings revealed that in the oral conflict stories, the majority of the subjects' initial responses to the conflict (18 stories out of 31) involved physical aggression and domination rather than concern for others. However, a third party help

[2] Data was collected orally from this group, including basic demographic information.

was the priority response found in the written conflict stories (10 stories out of 29). Also, the results showed that non-literate Karimojong tended to respond to conflict with domination and competition. In contrast, people with education were less likely to solve the conflict with aggression; instead, they tended to be concerned for the others or sought for a third party help. Therefore, even though the results were different from previous studies which showed that people from collectivistic cultures were less direct and aggressive and had more concern for others than people from individualistic cultures, Jabs (2005) concluded that several factors may influence their response styles and education might be one of them.

Another quantitative study done by Hong (2005) examined Koreans' and US intracultural and intercultural conflict management strategies. The purpose of this study was to compare how Koreans and US participants manage conflict involving intracultural and intercultural communication. The researcher attempted to find out whether any major characteristics of Koreans' and US conflict resolution strategies in intralcultural and intercultural conflict existed, whether there were any similarities and differences between Koreans and US participants in their intracultural and intercultural conflict resolution strategies, and whether the scores of individuals' conflict resolution strategies in intracultural interaction would increase or decrease in intercultural interaction.

Participants were 300 Koreans and 300 US participants. They were asked to complete a questionnaire in their native languages in which their preferences for intracultural and intercultural conflict management strategies were tested. The instrument included twenty-five items of conflict managing strategies (avoidance,

competition, compromise, accommodation and collaboration) measured on a five-point Likert scale. T-tests were conducted to test whether there were any significant differences between the Korean and US participants.

The results revealed that the Koreans tended to use collaboration, compromise, accommodation, avoidance, and competition approaches and preferred to be cooperative in both intercultural and intracultural conflict. The US participants preferred collaboration, compromise, accommodation, competition, and avoidance strategies in turn and tended to be cooperative in intercultural conflict and assertive in intracultural conflict. The results of the t-tests revealed that the Koreans preferred avoidance and accommodation conflict resolution strategies and were cooperative in both intercultural and intracultural conflict. The US participants showed preference for competition strategies and were assertive in both intercultural and intracultural conflict. The cooperative tendency and compromise and collaboration approaches employed by Koreans in intracultural interaction tended to decrease in intercultural interaction; whereas the assertive tendency and competition conflict resolution strategies in intracultural interaction tended to decrease in intercultural interaction.

In sum, despite some inconsistent findings, the review of related research on the problem of cultural differences in conflict resolution situations has provided the following major insights. First of all, members of individualistic cultures like the United States were resolution-oriented. To solve a conflict situation, they showed a greater inclination towards direct, assertive, competitive, and confrontational resolution strategies. According to related research, they have been cultivated to express their

opinions and emotions clearly since their young age (Hsu, 1970) so that they have to talk it out to solve the problems (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). On the other hand, members of collectivistic cultures like China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea were harmony-oriented. To solve a conflict situation, they showed a greater inclination towards indirect, collaborative, avoiding, integrating and non-confrontational resolution strategies. Thus, culture values take an important role in responding to conflicts.

However, alongside the evidence in support of old cultural distinctions between individualistic and collectivistic societies, the review of literature also revealed a tendency towards emerging behaviors where behaviors once attributed to a specific culture have become less distinct. For example, the adoption of avoidance conflict resolution strategies once associated with collectivistic cultures was also observed within individualistic cultures and was favored more by males rather than females (Lee and Rogan, 1991). In addition, females from both individualistic and collectivistic cultures were inclined to employ a direct solution of the problem more often than males (Hodis, 2005). This emerging tendency has not been given due attention in extant research which, despite the changing dynamics of our world, continues to emphasize on pre-established norms and beliefs. Therefore, the present study has been designed as an exploratory one which draws on the findings of previous research, but also lets the data speak for itself. That is, it is data-driven, rather than hypotheses driven.

Also, in consideration of the fact that none of the above discussed studies has examined cultural differences in academic settings, this study aimed to add to the existing body of empirical knowledge another dimension. Since in the present day society,

academic settings tend to involve diverse multicultural populations, it was reasoned that a better understanding of the effect of culture in student-professor and student-student conflict resolution strategies would be relevant and helpful for understanding the dynamics of academic life. Also, in view of the fact that the US universities are among the ones with the most culturally diverse student and faculty populations, it was considered appropriate to conduct this study in the context of a US university. This was also convenient for the researcher who was at the time completing an MA degree in TESOL at a US university.

The next chapter presents the methodology that guided the process of data collection and analyses.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology of the present study which employed a mixed design since the data were collected and analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The mixed design was considered appropriate for the purpose of the study which aimed not only to identify cultural differences in managing academic conflict situations, but also to provide understanding about the motives underlying certain conflict resolution styles.

3.1 Research Problem

The primary purpose of this study was to explore how college age students from two different cultures, the US, representing an individualistic culture, and Taiwan, representing a collectivistic culture, dealt with conflict situations in an academic context. In addition, the motives underlying participants' choices to deal with academic conflict were examined in view of whether they stemmed from cultural differences related to individualistic and collectivistic societies.

3.2 Research Questions

Since this was a mixed study, it involved two types of questions, quantitative questions and qualitative questions.

Quantitative Questions:

Question 1: Do Taiwanese and US college students use different strategies to solve conflict situation in classroom settings? What are the patterns of differences as revealed by percentages?

Question 2: Overall, in the four classroom scenarios, which of the following conflict resolution strategies significantly discriminate between US college students and Taiwanese college students?

1) Direct and public mentioning of the problem
2) Implied/indirect naming of the problem in public
3) Indirect mentioning of the problem in private
4) Direct complaint to a higher status/authority
5) Indirect complaint to peers in public
6) Avoidance

Qualitative Question:

Question 3: What are the motives underlying participants' choices to deal with classroom conflict?

3.3 Variables

3.3.1 Dependent Variables

There was only one dependent variable involved in the present study, Group of Subjects. The dependent variable, Group of Subjects, included two levels, US college students and Taiwanese college students. It was measured on a nominal scale.

3.3.2 Independent Variables

Question 1 – The Independent Variables in question 1 were types of responses, including the options that were given a priori, while those that appeared under "Other" were to be emerging. The a priori categories were categorized into different entries specific to each scenario. All of them were measured and calculated by frequency of occurrence. Therefore, the Independent Variables included:

Scenario 1 – 1) Frequency of direct and public mentioning of the problem

2) Frequency of direct mentioning of the problem in private

3) Frequency of implied/indirect naming of the problem in public

4) Frequency of implied/indirect naming of the problem in private

5) Frequency of direct complaint to a higher status/authority

6) Frequency of indirect complaint to the third party in public

7) Frequency of avoidance

8) Other

Scenario 2 – 1) Frequency of direct mentioning of the problem

2) Frequency of implied/indirect mentioning of the problem

3) Frequency of direct complaint to a higher status/authority

4) Frequency of implied/indirect mentioning of the problem to the third party

5) Frequency of avoidance

6) Other

Scenario 3 – 1) Frequency of direct mentioning of the problem

2) Frequency of implied/indirect mentioning of the problem

3) Frequency of direct complaint to a higher status/authority

4) Frequency of implied/indirect mentioning of the problem involving physical reactions

5) Frequency of Avoidance

6) Other

Scenario 4 – 1) Frequency of direct mentioning of the problem

2) Frequency of indirect/implied mentioning of the problem

3) Frequency of direct complaint to a higher status/authority

4) Frequency of making another suggestion

5) Frequency of avoidance

6) Other

Question 2 – Since question 2 was a qualitative question, independent and dependent variables did not apply to this question. Instead, this question aimed to elicit rationales and patterns in the participants' reactions and responses to each category.

3.4 Participants

Since this study aimed to compare an individualistic culture and a collectivistic culture when they dealt with classroom conflict, two groups of participants, US and Taiwanese college students, with a total of thirty subjects were selected. For a balanced design, there were fifteen people in each group, i.e. fifteen US and fifteen Taiwanese participants. Also, there were seven males and eight females in each group. The first group, the US subjects, was randomly recruited from the FRAN 101A Elementary French class at a Midwestern University in the US. The FRAN 101A Elementary French class was one of the language classes in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures in Fall 2007. The students enrolled in this class were either undergraduate students or graduate students with different majors.

The Taiwanese subjects were recruited from the population of the Taiwanese Student Association at the same US university. The researcher first approached them personally and asked for their consent to participate in the study. Also, since more subjects were needed, the researcher used snowball sampling where recruited students helped the researcher contact other Taiwanese students on campus. To avoid confounding influences, all Taiwanese subjects had to have spent less than one year in the United States. In addition, any participants who were graduate assistants were

excluded since graduate assistants were not deemed valid representatives of the general student population.

3.5 Research Instrument

The instrument used to collect the data included two parts. Part One was a written questionnaire with a demographic section and four scenarios. Part Two involved an audio-recorded interview with randomly selected subjects.

3.5.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire used to collect the data contained two main sections. The first section asked for demographic information (See Appendix B) such as age, gender, time living abroad, language known other than their native languages, and major field of study, etc. Any participants who were graduate assistants were excluded from the study since they were not regarded as valid representatives of the general population of college students.

The second section of the questionnaire aimed to determine whether participants from the two different cultures would employ specific strategies in dealing with classroom conflict. This section included four scenarios[3] based on conflict situations in an academic context. There were six to eight responses[4] for participants to choose from each scenario. In order to assure the validity of the instrument, these four scenarios were

[3] The ideas for these four scenarios came from what happened to the researcher herself in reality after she studied in the United States.

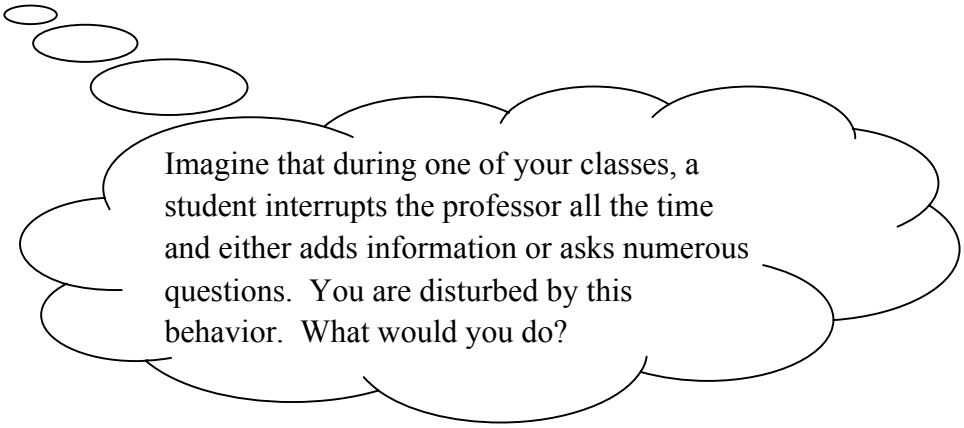
[4] Those responses were proofed by native speakers to make them sound more authentic.

all based on conflicts typical of classroom culture, including conflict situations between groups, between individuals and between professor and students. The following example illustrates the format of the scenario in this section.

Example 1:

Please read the following scenarios and try to answer how you would deal with it if you were in these situations. Choose **ONE** that you are most likely to use in this situation.

SCENARIO 1



1.1. ☐ Say to **your professor <u>in class</u>**, "I am trying to listen and understand. Can he/she stop interrupting you?"

1.2. ☐ Say to **your professor <u>in the office</u>**, "In your class, I am trying to listen and understand. Can he/she stop interrupting you next time we have class?"

2.1. ☐ Say to **the student <u>in class</u>**, "Could you possibly not interrupt the class?"

2.2. ☐ Say to **the student <u>outside of the class</u>**, "You keep interrupting the professor. Could you possibly not interrupt the class?"

3. ☐ **In class**, say to **your neighbor** so that the professor can hear it: "I wish he/she would stop talking!"

4. ☐ Make a complaint to the chair of the department without talking

to the professor.

5. ☐ Do nothing and keep silent in class.

6. ☐ Other (Please specify in the space provided below.)

_____
_____
_____
_____

3.5.2 Interview

The interview was conducted to elicit participants' motives for choosing certain approaches to classroom conflicts. For this purpose, three participants from each group were randomly selected and asked to elaborate on their responses to the scenarios. The interview questions were presented as follows:

1) Can you briefly explain your answers to scenario 1, 2, 3, and 4?
2) Why did you choose that response?
3) Is this what people from your culture will normally do?
4) a. Can you recall a classroom conflict you have had?

   b. Can you tell me briefly about it?

   c. How did you deal with it?

3.5.3 Procedures

Before taking the questionnaire, instructions were given to each participant. After finishing the questionnaire, three participants from each group were randomly selected for an interview. To keep their anonymity, a number was assigned to their questionnaire and also given to them on a note card which they would bring with them when

interviewed. The interview took place in a relaxed and quiet environment with the participants' consent, and each interview was recorded.

All of the US participants were administered the questionnaire as a group after their Elementary French Class by their lecturer, following all the instructions and requirements provided by the researcher. In general, it took approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The interview lasted around 10 to 15 minutes, too.

Nevertheless, the same procedure did not work for the Taiwanese participants. Data were collected from the Taiwanese participants individually either in the researcher's office, the student center on campus or the participants' classrooms due to the limitation of "less than one year stay in the United States." Overall, the questionnaire took 15 to 20 minutes to complete and the interview about 10 to 15 minutes. While the collection of US data was done within a week, the collection of Taiwanese data lasted for a month.

3.6 Analysis of Data

Since this was a mixed design study, the analyses of data involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. Specifically, the following methods were used following the research questions.

Question One and Two: To answer these two questions, the SPSS program was used to examine the frequencies of conflict resolution strategies between the two cultural groups. Also, Discriminant Function Analysis was performed at alpha = .05 to find out which responses significantly discriminated between the groups.

Question Three: The data associated with this question were examined through a qualitative method. By reexamining the participants' responses and recording, each response was categorized and analyzed into different categories. Also, all of these categories were counted into frequencies, i.e. direct and public mentioning of the problem, indirect mentioning of the problem in private, implied/indirect naming of the problem in public, implied/indirect naming of the problem in private, direct complaint to a higher status/authority, indirect complaint to a third party in public, asking for a third party's help and avoidance. The information under "Other" was investigated and categorized further in additional categories and added to the list.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the data analyses following the research questions proposed in Chapter III. Question 1 aimed to find out whether Taiwanese and US college students use different strategies to solve conflict situations in classroom settings and to identify the patterns of differences as revealed by percentages. Question 2 was to identify which conflict resolution strategies would significantly discriminate between US college students and Taiwanese college students: 1) Direct and public mentioning of problem; 2) Implied/indirect naming of the problem in public; 3) Indirect mentioning of the problem in private; 4) Direct complaint to a higher status/authority; 5) Indirect complaint to peers in public; and 6) Avoidance. In terms of the qualitative questions, the researcher aimed to find out the motives underlying participants' choices to deal with classroom conflict.

4.1 Results for Question 1

Question 1 was a descriptive question which aimed to identify patterns of differences between the two groups calculated in percentages. The results for each scenario are presented below.

4.1.1 Scenario One

Scenario One investigated the conflict resolutions strategies that US and Taiwanese students would use in a classroom in which a student keeps interrupting the

professor. The results of the descriptive analyses yielded eight responses as follows: 1) Directly address the problem to the professor in class; 2) Address the problem to the professor in his/her office; 3) Indirectly mention the problem to the student in class; 4) Mention the problem to the interrupting student outside of class; 5) Mention the problem to a neighbor in class; 6) Complain to the chair of the department; 7) Do nothing; and 8) Fight back (Other). All 30 subjects, 15 in each group, responded to this scenario as they selected one of the eight given options. Regarding the open-ended category "Other," only one student in the Taiwanese group (5%) proposed a different strategy which the student formulated as "fight back." The frequency of occurrence of each of the seven given options and the one under "Other" was calculated in percentages within each group. Figure 1 summarizes the results for the US and Taiwanese samples.

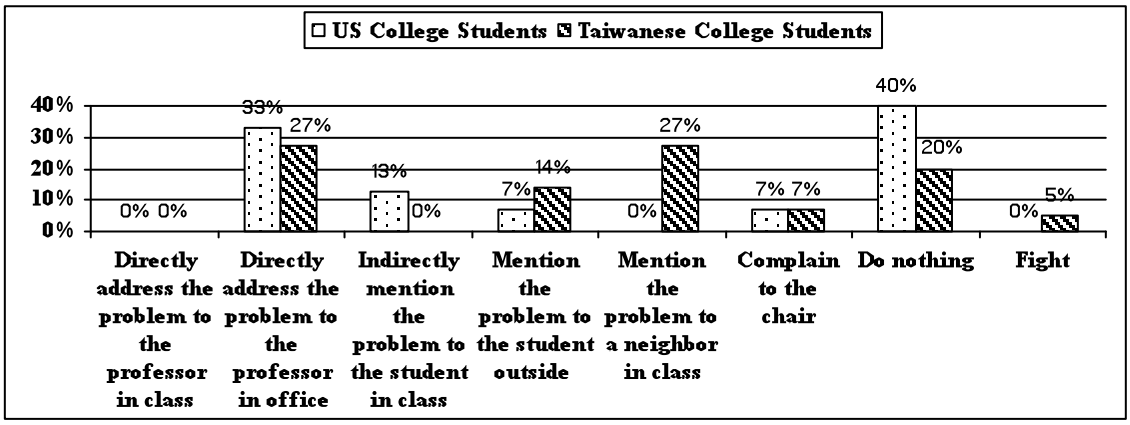


Figure 1. Responses to Scenario One in percentages

Overall, the results showed some similarities and differences between the two groups of subjects. The main differences were observed in that two times as many US students (40%) chose the option "Do nothing" as compared to the Taiwanese group (20%). Another difference was that the US participants preferred to indirectly address

the problem to the student who was interrupting (13%), while the Taiwanese participants indicated that they would use an indirect strategy by addressing the problem to their neighbor in class (27%). Also, addressing the problem to the student who interrupted outside of class was indicated as a possible strategy by twice more Taiwanese students (14%) than US students (7%). On the other hand, the similarities were that none of the groups would mention the problem directly to the professor in class (0% both groups), and would rather discuss it in the professor's office (US group 33%, Taiwanese 27%). Also, an equally low percentage of the students in both groups (7%) would take the problem to a higher status person, i.e. the chair of the department.

4.1.2 Scenario Two

Scenario Two examined conflict resolution strategies in a classroom in which a student dominates the whole discussion while working in a group. The results of the descriptive analyses revealed six responses as follows: 1) Directly address the problem to the student who dominates the discussion; 2) Indirectly address the problem to the student who dominates the discussion; 3) Complain to the instructor; 4) Mention the problem to one of the other classmates in class; 5) Do nothing; and 6) Fight back and dominate back." All 30 participants, 15 in each group, responded to this scenario as they selected one of the six given options. In terms of the open-ended category "Other," one US subject (6%) and two Taiwanese subjects (13%) adapted different strategies which the students formulated as "fight back and dominate back." The frequency of occurrence of each of the six options including those under "Other" was calculated in percentages

within each group. The results for the US and Taiwanese samples are presented in Figure 2.

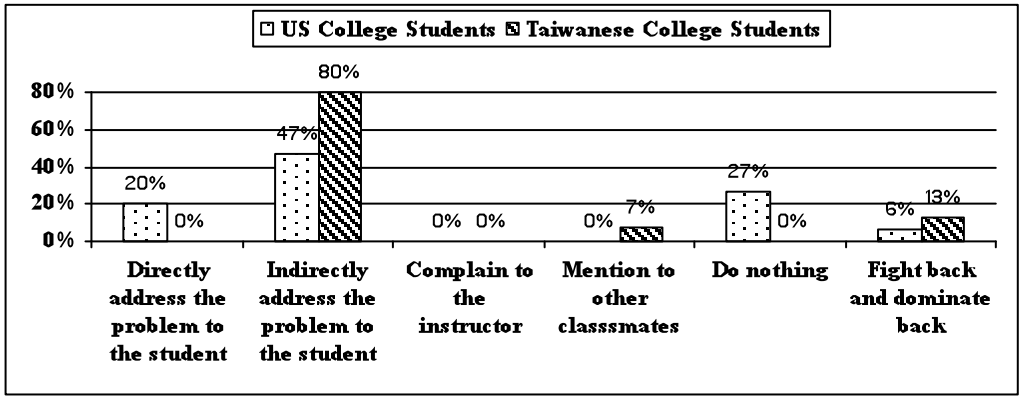


Figure 2. Responses to Scenario Two in percentages

The descriptive results presented some similarity and differences between the two groups of subjects. The primary differences were observed in that the US subjects (20%) tended to respond to this classroom conflict with the strategy of "Directly address the problem" as compared to the Taiwanese subject (0%). Yet, the Taiwanese students (80%) preferred to indirectly address the problem. Some Taiwanese students also indicated that they would mention the problem to other classmates in class (7%). Another difference was that 27% of the students in the US group chose the option "Do nothing" while none of the students in the Taiwanese group chose the option "Do nothing" (0%). On the other hand, the similarity was that none of the subjects in the two groups would complain to a higher authority, i.e. the instructor (0% in both groups).

4.1.3 Scenario Three

Scenario Three studied how US college students and Taiwanese college students dealt with classroom conflict in a situation where some students keep chatting while the instructor is giving a lecture. Five types of responses were coded. 1) Directly address the problem to noisy students; 2) Less directly address the problem to noisy students; 3) Complain to the professor; 4) Take physical action to stop noisy students; and 5) Do nothing. All 15 subjects in both groups selected one of the five provided options. Also, some students from each group provided strategies under the open-ended category "Other." However, those strategies were merged into the five provided options, especially the options "Directly address the problem" as well as "Taking physical action" since they were identical in meaning but stated in different words. The frequency of occurrence of each option was calculated in percentages within each group. The descriptive results for both the US and Taiwanese groups are summarized in Figure 3.

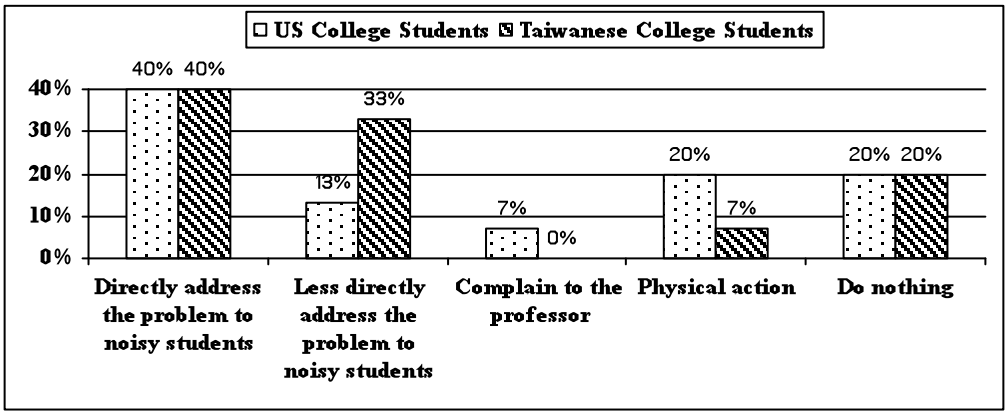


Figure 3. Responses to Scenario Three in percentages

Figure 3 illustrates the differences and similarities between the two groups. The major difference was observed in that more Taiwanese participants (33%) selected the option "Less direct" as compared to the US participants (13%). Another difference was

that almost three times more US subjects (20%) tended to solve this conflict by taking physical action than the Taiwanese group (7%). Also, some US participants (7%) preferred to take the problem to a higher status, i.e. the professor. The similarities observed were that an equal percentage of the students in both the US and Taiwanese groups would directly address the problem to the noisy students (40% in both groups) and would prefer to "Do nothing" (20% in both groups).

4.1.4 Scenario Four

Scenario Four investigated how US subjects and Taiwanese subjects coped with a situation in which a classmate asks for making a copy of a class assignment which contributes a big percentage of a student's grade. The results of the descriptive analyses revealed six responses as follows: 1) Directly refuse the classmate who asks for making a copy of the assignment; 2) Politely refuse the classmate who asks for making a copy of the assignment; 3) Complain to the professor; 4) Make another suggestion; 5) Refuse the classmate who asks for making a copy of the assignment with excuses; 6) Provide help to the classmate who asks for making copy of the assignment. All 30 subjects, 15 in each group, responded to this scenario since they chose one of the six given options. As for the open-ended option "Other," four students in the US group (27%) and two students in the Taiwanese group (13%) offered a different strategy which was defined as "Provide help." The frequency of occurrence of each of the five given options and the one under "Other' was calculated in percentages within each group. Figure 4 illustrates the results for the US and Taiwanese samples.

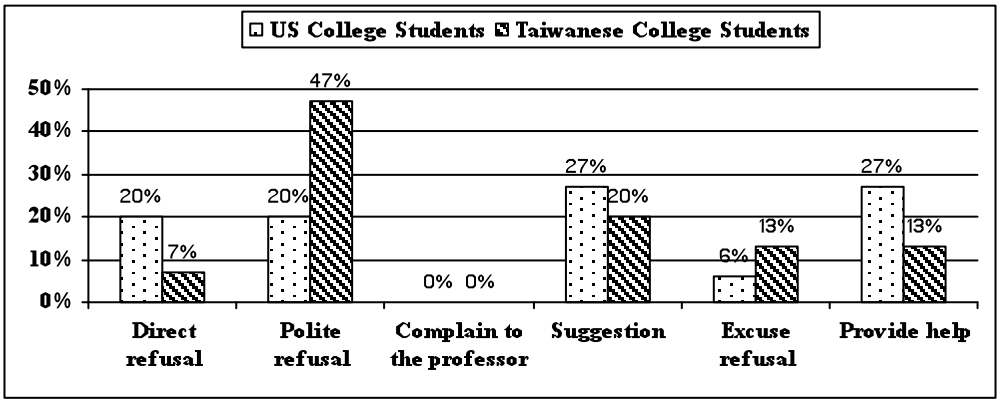


Figure 4. Responses to Scenario Four in percentages

As illustrated by Figure 4, the main differences were that the US sample (20%) preferred to directly refuse the classmate who asks for making copy of the assignment; while, the Taiwanese sample (47%) were more likely to politely refuse the classmate who asks for making a copy of the assignment. Also, as compared to the Taiwanese group (13%), the results showed that twice more US subjects (27%) preferred to provide help. Another difference was observed in that refusing the classmate who asks for making a copy of the assignment with excuses was a strategy preferred by twice more Taiwanese subjects (13%) than the US subjects (6%). On the other hand, the similarities were that none of the groups would take the problem to a higher authority, i.e. the professor (0% in both groups) and would rather make another suggestion to the students who ask for making a copy of the assignment (US 27%, Taiwanese 20%). For instance, they would suggest to the student to ask the professor for help.

4.2 Results for Question 2

Question 2 aimed to find out if the use of certain conflict resolution strategies was significantly associated with being an US and Taiwanese. For this purpose, the results from the four scenarios were collapsed and six predicator variables were calculated, including "Direct public address of problem," "Indirect public address of problem," "Indirect private address of problem," "Address problem to authority," "Address problem to peers," and "Avoidance." The emergent categories like "Fight and dominate back" were not included in the statistical analysis since they were specific to some of the scenarios and did not apply to all situations. The mean scores for each subject group were calculated for each of the above categories of responses. The descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for each subject group

Nationality	Category of responses	Mean	Standard Deviation	Total number of the subjects
US	Direct public address of problem	.20	.22	15
	Indirect public address of problem	.18	.20	
	Indirect private address of problem	.33	.49	
	Address problem to authority	.03	.09	
	Address problem to peers	.00	.00	
	Avoidance	.29	.33	
Taiwanese	Direct public address of problem	.12	.13	15
	Indirect public address of problem	.37	.13	
	Indirect private address of problem	.27	.46	
	Address problem to authority	.02	.06	
	Address problem to peers	.17	.24	
	Avoidance	.13	.17	

Overall, the descriptive statistics for the US group revealed that the strategies of "Indirect private address of problem" (*Mean*= .33) and "Avoidance" (*Mean*= .29) were the most preferred among the six types of conflict resolution strategies. In terms of the descriptive statistics for the Taiwanese group, Table 1 shows that the Taiwanese subjects were more likely to use the strategies of "Indirect public address of problem" (*Mean*= .37) as well as "Indirect private address of problem" (*Mean*= .27) among the six types of responses.

The six categories ("Direct public address of problem," "Indirect public address of problem," "Indirect private address of problem," "Address problem to authority," "Address problem to peers," and "Avoidance") served as predictor variables in a discriminant function analysis (DFA), the purpose of which was to find out which of the six types of responses were significantly associated with the two groups of subjects. In other words, the study aimed to identify whether certain conflict resolution strategies were significant predictors of group identify, i.e. of being US or Taiwanese. The DFA showed that one canonical discriminant function (*eigenvalue* = .734, *canonical correlation* = . 651) was significantly discriminating between the two groups, *Wilks' Lambda* = .577, $\chi 2$ (6) = 13.767, p = .032. The Means for Function one are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Means: Function One

Strategy	Function 1
Indirect public address of problem	-.658
Address problem to peers	-.583
Avoidance	.358
Direct public address of problem	.283
Address problem to authority	.130
Indirect private address of problem	.085

Note: Positive scores are associated with the US subjects, while negative scores are associated with the Taiwanese subjects.

The total structure coefficients were also calculated in order to see whether there was significant evidence that would allow the discriminant function to be identified with certain strategies. These are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Discriminant Function coefficients for two groups

Strategy	Discriminant Score from Function 1
Indirect private address of problem	.112
Avoidance	.451*
Address problem to authority	.171
Direct public address of problem	.363*
Indirect public address of problem	-.755**
Address problem to peers	-.687**

Note: 1. Positive scores are associated with the US subjects while negative scores are associated with the Taiwanese subjects.

2. * significant at alpha .05; ** significant at $p < .001$

As illustrated in Table 3, the US group was significantly associated with the use of "Avoidance" as well as "Direct public address of problem." On the other hand, the Taiwanese students were significantly associated with the use of "Indirect public address

of problem" and "Address problem to peers." Therefore, the discriminant function that was significantly associated with being US or Taiwanese student was labeled *Level of Directness*. According to the classification statistics, this function was discriminating between the two groups with 76.7% accuracy. To be more specific, if the nationality of the subjects was not known, a direct conflict resolution strategy would predict a US student; while an indirect resolution strategy would assume a Taiwanese student.

4.3 Results for Question 3

The last part of the instrument was an interview which aimed to find out the motives that were underlying participants' choices to deal with classroom conflict. Further to the results from the quantitative part which indicated that the US group showed preferences for direct resolution strategies; while the Taiwanese group showed preferences for indirect resolution strategies, the present section presents the specific reasons behind these choices. In the following qualitative part, the results are organized to show participants' motives in relation to specific conflict resolution strategies. Quotes from the content analysis of the transcribed data are included when appropriate.

4.3.1 Direct Resolution Strategies

The category of direct resolution strategies included three subcategories: direct public style, less direct public style and direct private style. The content analysis of the transcribed data revealed the following motives as underlying participants' preferences for a direct solution of a problem.

Motive One: A direct public resolution was used when the situation needed immediate interference.

Even those participants who opted for a direct public resolution of a problem situation, recognized that it was very difficult to deal confrontationally with a conflict. Actually, they would prefer not to handle conflict directly and would employ confrontation only when a situation needed immediate resolution. This tendency is illustrated by the following quote from a US participant in response to the scenario in which some students keep chatting loudly in class: *"Because they do not get the professor's saying (…) telling them to be silent and give them a look. (…) when you cannot be indirect anymore, you have to be direct and say them."* A similar view-point was mentioned by a Taiwanese subject who said, *"I will feel very angry so I will talk to the student* [who chatting loudly in class] *directly."*

Motive Two: A direct public resolution strategy was used to solve an unfair situation.

Some of the interviewees mentioned that the reason why they chose to respond to a conflict with a direct method was to resolve an unfair situation. For instance, one of the subjects who had responded to the situation in which a student asks for making a copy of an assignment with "Say to him/her, 'No, copying assignment is not allowed'" explained that as he worked hard on assignments, it would be unfair to let others copy his assignment. Therefore, he chose to directly reject the request.

Motive Three: A less direct public approach was used to serve as a warning.

In some situations, the interviewees perceived that the problematizers might not be aware of a developing conflict situation. In such cases, in order to bring the problem to their notice, they would warn them by utilizing a direct conflict strategy. For instance, one of the US interviewees explained that the reason why he would directly address students who keep chatting loudly in class was *"... so maybe they realize that they're noising other students. So they'll be quite."*

Motive Four: A direct private strategy was utilized in order not to disturb others.

Some subjects mentioned that they preferred to deal with a conflict directly to shorten the duration or to avoid the reoccurrence of a problem situation. An American interviewee who had chosen the option "Say to the professor in the office, 'In your class, I am trying to listen and understand. Can he/she stop interrupting you next time we have class?'" provided the following explanation for this choice: *"I think it's very rude that the students want to disturb the class. So instead of me to speak in class by saying something to the student or the teacher, I'll ask after the class."*

4.3.2 Indirect Resolution Strategies

As indicated by the quantitative results, indirect resolution strategies were primarily associated with the Taiwanese group. The content analysis of the transcribed data revealed some of the motives behind the Taiwanese group's responses. These were as follows.

Motive One: Everyone should get an equal opportunity.

This motive was given by a number of the participants in both the US and the Taiwanese groups. The difference was that the US group would seek "equal opportunity" by direct style resolution; while the Taiwanese group preferred indirect style resolution. Therefore, most of the students were striving to establish "equal opportunity," however by different approaches. To exemplify, A Taiwanese participant studying in the Center for English as Second Language (CESL) at SIUC said, *"We pay the same tuition in here for studying English. ... we have the more equal chance to practice our English to perform our idea."* The above quote explains why she chose to tell the student who would dominate a discussion, 'Maybe each of us could take turns to share ideas and then discuss them together.'" The reasons why Taiwanese students opted for indirect rather than direct resolution of the problem situations is further explained by the next motive.

Motive Two: An indirect approach was used in order not to embarrass the problematizer.

Most of the Taiwanese participants mentioned that the reason why they opted for an indirect approach in solving classroom conflict situations was because they were concerned about the problematizer's feelings. Therefore, they did not want to embarrass this person. For example, a Taiwanese participant gave the following explanation for why she chose an indirect approach to deal with a student who interrupts the professor all the time in class: *"Maybe I think if I ask her or ask she don't speak too much in the class, maybe it'll a little embarrassed."* This rationale is also closely related to the next motive.

Motive Three: It was difficult to mention the problem directly.

In the Taiwanese culture, it is difficult for people to address the problem directly since people try to avoid not only embarrassing others, but also putting themselves in embarrassing situations. Therefore, as a result some people adopt an approach that they may not really like, but which stems from their cultural background. In this connection, a Taiwanese graduate student explained his inner contradiction: *"In my mind, I would like to choose this answer,* 'Um… I am sorry, but I don't feel comfortable giving you my assignment.' *because sometimes to reject your friend directly maybe improper to me. But, if it really happen, maybe I will let her copy my assignment."* The student was obviously aware that in a real situation, his cultural values were going to win over his reason.

Motive Four: An indirect resolution strategy was chosen to prevent another unnecessary conflict.

This motive could be considered a sub-category of the previous one. To be more specific, the reason why an indirect style was more likely to be used was that people were afraid that another unnecessary conflict might occur if the original conflict was handled directly. A Taiwanese participant said that the reason why he preferred to use an indirect way of making an "interrupting student" aware that there was a problem was *"because sometimes maybe … I… familiar with that student or maybe we just don't know each other. So, if I just talk to him directly to stop this behavior* [interrupting the professor in class] *and I maybe I will get into trouble."* Therefore, in order to avoid another unnecessary conflict, an indirect style resolution was deemed more appropriate.

4.3.3 Avoidance Resolution Strategies

As shown from the quantitative results, avoidance resolution strategies were used by both the US and Taiwanese groups, but they were mainly associated with the US group. After a careful exploration of the transcribed data, the following motives underlying the participants' choices to avoid handling conflict situations were extracted.

Motive One: To keep the peace.

In the previous section, indirect strategies were attributed to a participant's desire to avoid further confrontations. In this section, participants' desire to "keep the peace" had led them to deal with a conflict situation by ignoring it. To exemplify, in Scenario Three in which some students keep chatting loudly in class even though the professor asks them to be silent several times, the "do nothing" approach was selected by a Taiwanese female participant. She explained that since it did not work after the professor's warnings, she would not want to take any action either. Most importantly, she worried that *"if they didn't follow you at all."* she would be disliked. *"We want to keep the peace,"* she said.

Motive Two: Eventually, somebody would take action to stop the conflict.

Another reason emerging from the transcribed data was that someone else would deal with the conflict eventually. This reason was mainly provided by the US subjects. One of the US interviewees said that he did not want to be the one being mean to the problematizer so he preferred doing nothing. Also, he believed that if people could not tolerate the problem anymore, they would do something or say something to solve it.

Motive Three: Everyone has the right to do whatever he/she wants.

One of the reasons why subjects chose to deal with conflict situations with a "do nothing" approach was that they believed in a democratic society people could do whatever they want. Also, they did not want to be involved in conflict. According to these participants, in an academic setting, some people are eager to gain more knowledge from the professor and some people are eager to illustrate certain issues they are good at. To achieve one's academic goals, they could, therefore, do whatever they want. In such cases, no one should stop them. A US subject explained that in a situation in which an individual dominates the whole discussion, he would do nothing because this was the individual's right to do whatever he/she wanted. For this participant, any behavior was acceptable as a demonstration of democratic rights.

4.3.4 Providing help or suggestions as strategies for solving conflicts.

In the present study, these two strategies were employed only in relation to the scenario in which a classmate asks for permission to copy an assignment. As seen from the quantitative results, both the US group and the Taiwanese group liked to handle this situation by using suggestions, but the US group was more willing to handle it by providing help. The reason why they preferred to adopt this approach was because they did not want to put themselves or the problematizer in serious trouble, i.e. to turn a conflict into another serious problem. A US undergraduate subject mentioned that *"We can both be caught for plagiarism. (...) And that's worse then."* Also, they were concerned about their relationship with the problematizer and for this reason instead of

rejecting the problematizer's request directly or indirectly, they would prefer to offer them a suggestion or provide help.

4.3.5 Dominating Back

This strategy was employed only once by one US subject. The motive underlying the choice of dominating back was just like other strategies, to seek for an equality and balance. When asked for the rationale underlying his choice of dominating back at the student who is dominating a class discussion, the US participant explained that in order to let the problematizer understand that the discussion belonged to all, not just to him. *"You have to um… make an in… indirect way of saying backdown."* Obviously, for this student dominating back was an indirect way of dealing with the problem.

4.4 Where do motives come from?

The interview also included a question that asked participants whether the way they acted in response to a problem situation was typical of people from their culture. Despite the small sample size of the interviewees, some interesting themes emerged in the analyses of the data. For example, the US students pointed out that their reactions were greatly rooted in family upbringing and religion. The Taiwanese participants, on the other hand, talked about cultural values that emphasize on "private" discussion or resolution vs. "public." Not only did they perceive direct confrontation as "improper," but they also said that scenarios like the ones in the survey would be very rare in their culture. That is, students would not talk in class or dominate discussion. *"I think, in my*

country, we will keep silent," said a Taiwanese subject. On the other hand, two out of three US students mentioned that they had experienced similar situations. However, all interviewees pointed out that reactions to conflict are also personal and dependent on the situation and the distance between the problematizer and the receiver. Provided the small sample of interviewees any generalizations would not be appropriate; however, it can be noted that both cultural and personal reasons motivated the participants' responses to conflict.

So far the quantitative and qualitative results of the data analyses pointed at some interesting differences between the way US and Taiwanese students opt to handle conflict situations in academic context. There were also differences in the reasons why they preferred certain approaches. I will return to them in the next chapter in order to summarize and discuss the findings of this study and compare them to those of related research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a discussion of the results reported in the previous one in the order of the research questions. Following that, some recommendations for future research are provided. Finally, the limitations and contributions of the study are summarized.

5.1 Discussion

The first research question aimed to investigate whether Taiwanese and US college students employ different strategies to solve conflict situations in an academic context and to identify patterns of differences as revealed by percentages. The results of the descriptive analyses in relation to Scenario One in which a student keeps interrupting the professor in class showed that as compared to the Taiwanese students, the US students preferred an avoidance approach by doing nothing (40% vs. 20%) or a direct approach by directly addressing the student in class (13% vs. 0%). On the other hand, the Taiwanese students tended to handle this conflict situation indirectly outside of class (14% vs. 7%) or address the problem to their neighbor in class (27% vs. 0%).

The results of the descriptive analyses in Scenario Two in which a student dominates the discussion showed a similar pattern, i.e. the US participants were more likely to use an avoidance approach (27% vs. 0%) or a direct approach by addressing the problem to the student (20% vs. 0%). However, the Taiwanese subjects preferred using

indirect styles by indirectly addressing the problem (80% vs. 47%) or mentioning the problem to other classmates in class (7% vs. 0%).

The results of the descriptive analyses in Scenario Three in which some students keep chatting while the instructor is giving a lecture showed a different pattern, i.e. the Taiwanese subjects were more likely to use a less direct approach by addressing the problem to the noisy students (33% vs. 13%). The US subjects preferred taking physical action (20% vs. 7%) or taking the problem to a higher status (7% vs. 0%).

In Scenario Four in which a classmate asks for making a copy of a class assignment, the US participants tended to employ a direct approach by refusing the classmate who asked for making a copy of the assignment (20% vs. 7%) or to offer help (27% vs. 13%). The Taiwanese participants preferred an indirect approach by politely refusing the classmate who asked for making a copy of the assignment (47% vs. 20%) or refusing by providing excuses (13% vs. 6%).

When putting together the results of the four scenarios, it appears that the US students showed preference for a direct solution of the problems in all four situations or for avoiding dealing with the problem in three out of the four scenarios. On the other hand, the Taiwanese participants had a distinct tendency to opt for an indirect solution of the problems in all four scenarios.

The descriptive patterns observed in the US and Taiwanese groups were further confirmed by the statistical analyses which aimed to answer which of the following conflict resolution strategies would significantly discriminate between the US college students and Taiwanese college students: 1) Direct and public mentioning of problem; 2)

Implied/indirect naming of the problem in public; 3) Indirect mentioning of the problem in private; 4) Direct complaint to a higher status/authority; 5) Indirect complaint to peers in public; and 6) Avoidance. The results of discriminant function analysis (DFA) indicated that the US college students were significantly associated with direct and public mentioning of a problem or avoidance. On the other hand, the Taiwanese college students were significantly associated with implied/indirect address of the problem in public and indirect complaint to peers. The accuracy of the discriminant function was 76.7 %. Based on the statistically significant findings, a pattern of the level of directness was observed which differentiated the US and Taiwanese college students. When coping with conflict in an academic context, the US college students showed a significantly more direct approach; whereas the Taiwanese college students showed a significantly more indirect approach. Also, the Taiwanese college students employed the strategy of indirect complaint to peers significantly more. Finally, a rather surprising finding revealed that a pattern of avoidance was observed in the US college group.

The finding that the US college students tended to handle conflict through a direct strategy and the Taiwanese college students through an indirect strategy supports previous research by Brew and Cairns (2004), Chiu and Kosinski (1994), Hodis (2005), Knutson, Smith, Han and Hwang (2002), Lee and Rogan (1991), Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin and Nishida (1991) and Tinsley and Weldon (2003). All of these studies have found that people from the United States, ranked as a highly individualistic culture (Hofstede, 1984), tend to opt for more direct conflict management

approaches; while individuals from collectivistic cultures like Taiwan prefer indirect conflict management strategies.

The avoidance style of conflict management was preferred by the US college students more than the Taiwanese college students in this study. Even though this finding supports a previous investigation by Lee and Rogan (1991), it is contradictory to the majority of the previous studies (e.g. Hodis, 2005; Hong, 2005; and Ting-Toomey, Gao, Trubisky, Yang, Kim, Lin & Nishida, 1991) which have concluded that individualistic cultures show stronger preference for a solution-orientation style while collectivistic cultures display stronger preference for an avoidance style. For example, Ting-Toomey (1998) employing a quantitative survey data has concluded that members of individualistic cultures tend to solve conflict through dominating, passive aggressive and emotionally expressive strategies; while members of collectivistic cultures tend to solve conflict through avoiding, obliging and compromising strategies. The results also suggested that both members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures may use a third party help to deal with conflict. It is just that they will use it differently. For instance, in a situation in which a third party is needed, members of collectivistic cultures will seek the help of somebody who is familiar and respected. Members of individualistic cultures, on the other hand, will go to an unbiased and unfamiliar third party (Jabs, 2005).

A few of these strategies were also examined in the present study. The findings that were supported by the results of this research were that the emotionally expressive strategy was preferred by members of the individualistic culture, and a third party help was preferred by both members of the collectivistic and the individualistic culture but

pursued differently. That is, the US group chose to address the problem to an authority while the Taiwanese group preferred to seek the help of peers. This can also be related to previous research that suggested a third party help (Kozan and Ergin , 1998; Leung, Au, Fernández-Dols and Iwawaki, 1992). Overall, this and previous research have pointed that there seems to be a need for a third party in collectivistic cultures when confrontational situations arise.

The overall results for the usage of different strategies to solve conflict between the two groups indicated that when in conflict, the US college students handle it with a more direct style compared to their Taiwanese counterparts. Also, the US college students were more likely to employ the strategy of avoidance than the Taiwanese college students. It can be speculated that the observed differences emerged due to cultural influences. That is, US participants have been cultivated to express their opinions, thoughts and emotions clearly from an early age (Hsu, 1970; Takahashi, Ohara, Antonucci and Akiyama, 2002). That is why, they would be more independent, autonomous and self-centered and would express interpersonal conflict through the use of a direct approach without much concern for the feelings of others. Also, if necessary, they would talk to an authority. It seems that they believed that a person with a higher authority would be much more impartial. In addition, the reason why the US participants opted for taking physical actions to react to a conflict may be explained by their desire to express their opinion and feelings in a clear manner.

Correspondingly, in the Chinese society, people have been educated and cultivated to show great concern for others. In light of this, to express one's feelings is

not encouraged (Hsu, 1970), so people constrain strong expressions and direct responses to conflict. Most importantly, the values of relational harmony are emphasized. Therefore, if conflict situations arise, they try to consider the others' feelings and try to solve it peacefully. More specifically, they normally talk around the problem and avoid responding to the problem directly or talk about the problem to someone else. In the context of the present study, it seems that even though the Taiwanese participants were living in an individualistic culture, they had overall remained truthful to their native culture.

The results of the qualitative question which aimed to explore the motives underlying participants' choices to deal with classroom conflict provided further illustrations to explain the patterns observed in the quantitative analyses. When in conflict, the Taiwanese college students mentioned that the reason why they chose to respond with an indirect resolution approach was attributed to saving others' face, maintaining good interpersonal relationships as well as keeping a harmonious situation. This perspective was consistent with previous research done by Chiu and Kosinski (1994).

Correspondingly, the US college students explained that the reason why they chose to deal with conflict with a direct resolution style was because they believed that equity and fairness should exist anywhere in their society, so people should do their best to achieve what they want. Therefore, if they felt that they were bothered and their interest was influenced, they had to take some actions to stop it, such as a direct response to serve as a warning. This pattern supports what Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2001) have

pointed out that conflict management in a culture like the US involves "talking it out" to solve a problem.

Among these main trends that were congruent with extant theory and research about differences in conflict resolution strategies attributed to individualistic and collectivistic cultures, the data also revealed a pattern that was atypical of the predicted trends. Precisely, this was the fact that the US participants showed a preference for avoidance strategies in managing conflict situations that is usually associated with collectivistic mentality. In interpreting this finding, the qualitative data provided some insightful aspects that could not have been perceived through the quantitative analyses. Specifically, the qualitative results revealed that the US college students' avoidance to deal with conflict stemmed out of their beliefs in democratic rights. That is, it was considered a personal right to talk in class or ask questions to the professor. Also, they believed that somebody else who could not tolerate the situation would stop the conflict eventually. This aspect was contradictory to previous findings, according to which, "talking out problems" was a preferred strategy in the US culture (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). It can be speculated that this contradiction stemmed from individual family and religious traits instead of general individualistic and collectivistic cultural values. To exemplify, an US participant illustrated that he was raised in a religious family which valued peace; therefore, instead of solving the conflict himself, he would rather have others solve it. On another level, this finding may also suggest that in the context of the cultural diversity in the US, it can be that cultural behaviors and values are losing their definitions and are acquiring new dimensions through the active interaction

among different cultural groups. Consequently, the US college participants immersed in a diverse cultural environment, may have adopted behaviors less typical of their culture.

5.2 Overall Conclusion

So far the quantitative and qualitative results have indicated that the employment of conflict resolution strategies was significantly influenced by culture. That is, different approaches to solving classroom conflict were found in the two groups. Specifically, the US college students were inclined to use direct approaches or avoidance strategies in classroom conflict situations. This was attributed to the fact that the US college students were autonomous, self-centered and problem solution-oriented, so they had to express their opinions and emotions clearly.

On the other hand, the Taiwanese college students were more inclined to use indirect strategies and a third party to manage a classroom conflict. This was attributed to Taiwanese college students' concern for the feelings of others and their desire to maintain long-term relationships with others.

Alongside the above patterns, though, there were also findings that provided evidence contradictory to culturally predictable behaviors associated with individualistic and collectivistic values. This was exemplified through the US participants' tendency to opt for avoiding conflict, a strategy atypical of individualistic cultures. It was concluded that the rationales underlying it could stem from regional, family and religious influences or could be signaling a changing notion of culture with more fuzzy categories of behaviors.

Overall, the present study made insightful observations on how people from two different cultures manage conflict in an academic context. In the present day globalized society, with an increasing interaction among people around the world, this research has made a modest contribution to helping people understand differences in human behaviors related to cultural values and norms. It has also offered an insight about the need for re-defining culture and cultural behaviors in an emerging new world of less defined boundaries between and among countries.

5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study has contributed to understanding conflict-related reactions of US and Taiwanese college students in academic contexts, in professor-student and student-student relationships. In the process of data collection and analyses and interpreting the results, some limitations and observations were made that could inform future research about areas that need further investigation. These are outlined below:

1) Regarding the participants, the current study recruited 15 US college students as the US group included participants from a French class in a US university and 15 Taiwanese college students as the Taiwanese group included participants who have spent less than one year in the United States. Because of the small sample size, the results of this study should not be generalized to represent the entire cultures of US and Taiwanese college-age people. Especially, in view of the cultural diversity among the citizens of the US, the small sample of US college students can not be representative of the whole

population. Also, the recruitment of US participants from the French class only might have biased the findings. People of different ethnic groups and geographic regions may employ different conflict resolution strategies. Therefore, it is recommended that future research examine regional and ethnic differences in dealing with conflict.

2) In addition, this investigation did not clearly distinguish between undergraduate and graduate students. Instead, they were examined as a whole in the present study. However, graduate students who have a higher status and more social experiences than their undergraduate counterparts might employ different approaches when dealing with conflict situations. In this sense, it is interesting to compare undergraduate and graduate students in view of the way they handle conflict situations and in view of the motives and rationales underlying their reactions.
3) Another limitation of the present study relates to the effect of gender. This variable was not examined by this investigation, and therefore it is difficult to conclude whether all of the findings could be attributed to both genders. Future research might include this variable and examine whether gender influences participants' choices when dealing with conflict.
4) In view of the questionnaire, the four scenarios provided general situations without indicating interpersonal relationships between the problematizers and the respondents. It might be helpful and interesting to explore different responses with different relationships in identical scenarios. Also, the

provided answers for each scenario were designed as multiple-choice responses of which only one could be selected. This limited the participants to one option when they might have had more than one answers in mind. It may be interesting for future studies to allow the participants to select all relevant options and also explain when and why they will employ a certain strategy.

5) In view of the interview, three subjects randomly selected from each group were not sufficient. The gender distribution was unbalanced as there was no female interviewee in the US group which fact might have biased the findings.

5.4 Contributions of the Study

Despite the above-mentioned limitations, this research has been one of the few studies that focused on US and Taiwanese college students' interpersonal conflict resolution strategies in an academic context. In contrast, previous studies have mainly probed US and Taiwanese conflict management strategies in general or in a workplace setting.

In addition, this research was among the few that investigated conflict management through quantitative and qualitative methods, whereas most of the past research had been quantitative in nature. By employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, this study presented a better understanding of the US and Taiwanese cultural behaviors.

The present study has made a contribution to the area of sociolinguistics by examining and comparing interpersonal conflict management strategies of two cultures in an academic context. Alongside some expected outcomes related to differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, it was surprising to see that the US college students showed an inclination towards avoidance of dealing with conflict. While this finding can be attributed to regional, family and religious influences, it may also be suggesting that with the globalization of our modern world and the intensive interaction between and among cultures, old cultural distinctions may gradually become fuzzy as new subcultures are formed not so much based on nationality, but on common interests and values. Hopefully, this study has offered new insights in understanding human reactions to conflict situations and has thus promoted a better cross-cultural communication.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Dear participant,

My name is Li-Jung Huang. I am a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. I am currently doing a study to complete my Master's Degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. The purpose of this study is to examine how college age students from two different cultures, US and Taiwan, deal with conflict situations in an academic context. The study I am planning to conduct requires two main groups, American college students and Taiwanese college students. There will be ten subjects in each group. The subjects will be selected with an equal number of male and female students in each group. Also, the Taiwanese subjects will have stayed in the United States less than one year.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire with two sections which will take about 20 minutes to complete. All your responses will be confidential and anonymous. You will be asked to provide demographic information (gender, age, native language, other languages you know and time living abroad, etc.) about yourself, but not your names. After completing the questionnaire, 3 participants from each group will be randomly selected for an interview. They will be given a chance to decline participation. The interview will last 30 minutes and be recorded. The interview will be based on your responses to the questionnaire. If you agree to participate in this activity voluntarily, you should know that your responses will be recorded on audio files. If you agree to take part in the investigation, you need to sign this form. However, if you change your mind, you may withdraw at any time without hesitation.

The people who will have access to the data will be myself, the researcher, and my thesis advisor, Dr. Krassimira Charkova. After the study is completed, all data including questionnaire sheets and recording files will be destroyed. We will take all reasonable steps to protect your identity.

For additional information, please contact me, Li-Jung Huang, project researcher, 410 Southern Hills Drive, Apt. # 8, Carbondale, IL, 62901, phone number: (618) 303-3541, e-mail: coureiyo@siu.edu or Dr. Krassimira Charkova, research advisor, Department of Linguistics, Faner Hall 3225, SIUC, Carbondale, IL, 62901, Office phone number: (618) 453-6539, e-mail: sharkova@siu.edu.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, Southern

Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. Email: siuhsc@siu.edu

Thank you for your assistance in this research.

I have read the material above, and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand I will receive one copy of this form for the relevant information and phone numbers. I agree to participate and I realize that I may withdraw without prejudice at any time.

Name _____ Signature _____

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Check the appropriate box or fill in the box:

1. Gender: ☐ male ☐ female

2. Age:_____

3. Nationality: ☐ American ☐ Taiwanese

4. Are you a graduate assistant? ☐ Yes ☐ No

5. How long have you lived in the United States?

   a. ☐ 0-6 months

   b. ☐ 6-12 months

   c. ☐ 12-24 months

   d. ☐ more than 24 months

   e. ☐ I am an American citizen

6. Have you ever lived abroad?

   a. ☐ Yes. Which countries? _____ How long? _____

   b. ☐ No.

7. What is your native language?

   _____

8. What other language do you know besides English and your native language?

   _____

9. What is your current status?

   a. ☐ Undergraduate

b. ☐ Graduate

10. What language do you use outside of the classroom?

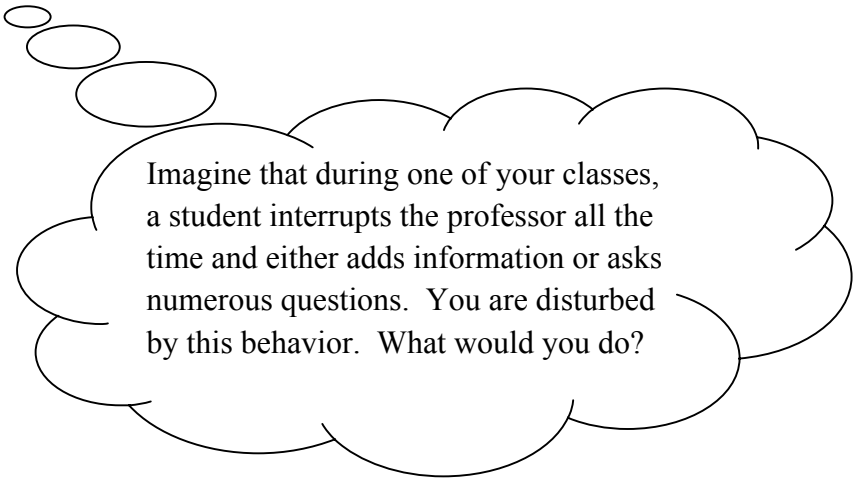
_____

11. What is your major field of study?

_____

Please read the following scenarios and try to answer how you would deal with it if you were in these situations. Choose **ONE** that you are most likely to use in this situation.

SCENARIO 1



1.1. ☐ Say to **your professor in class**, "I am trying to listen and understand. Can he/she stop interrupting you?"

1.2. ☐ Say to **your professor in the office**, "In your class, I am trying to listen and understand. Can he/she stop interrupting you next time we have class?"

2.1. ☐ Say to **the student in class**, "Could you possibly not interrupt the class?"

2.2. ☐ Say to **the student outside of the class**, "You keep interrupting the professor. Could you possibly not interrupt the class?"

3. ☐ **In class**, say to **your neighbor** so that the professor can hear it: "I wish he/she would stop talking!"

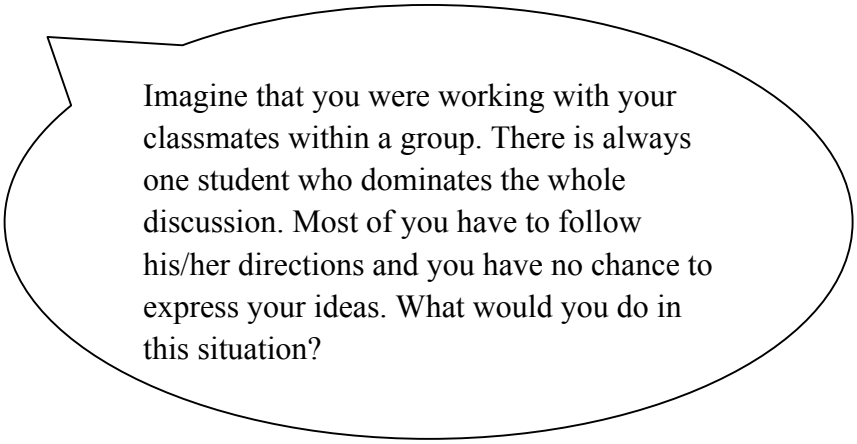
4. ☐ Make a complaint to the chair of the department without talking to the professor.

5. ☐ Do nothing and keep silent in class.

6. ☐ Other (Please specify in the space provided below.)

_____
_____
_____
_____

SCENARIO 2



1. ☐ Say to him/her, "You are dominating this discussion. Can we please let everyone take the floor equally?"

2. ☐ Say to him/her, "Maybe each of us could take turns to share his/her ideas and then discuss them together."

3. ☐ Make complaints to the instructor.

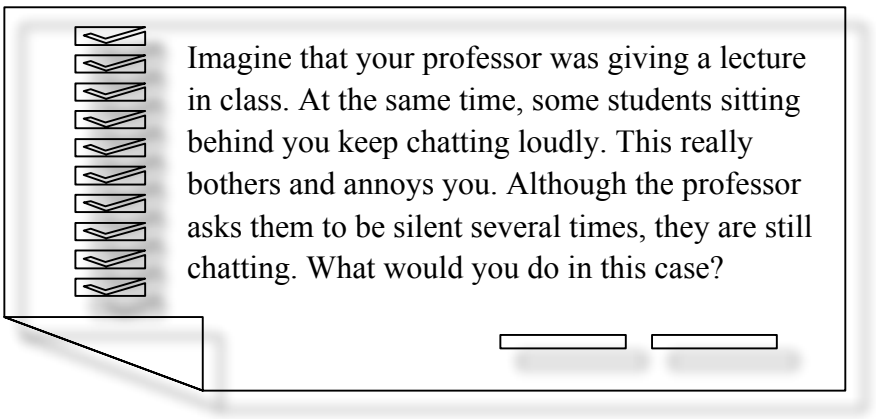
4. ☐ Say to one of your other classmates, "Didn't you say you had something to share?"

5. ☐ Follow his/her directions and do nothing.

6. ☐ Other (Please specify in the space provided below.)

_____
_____
_____
_____

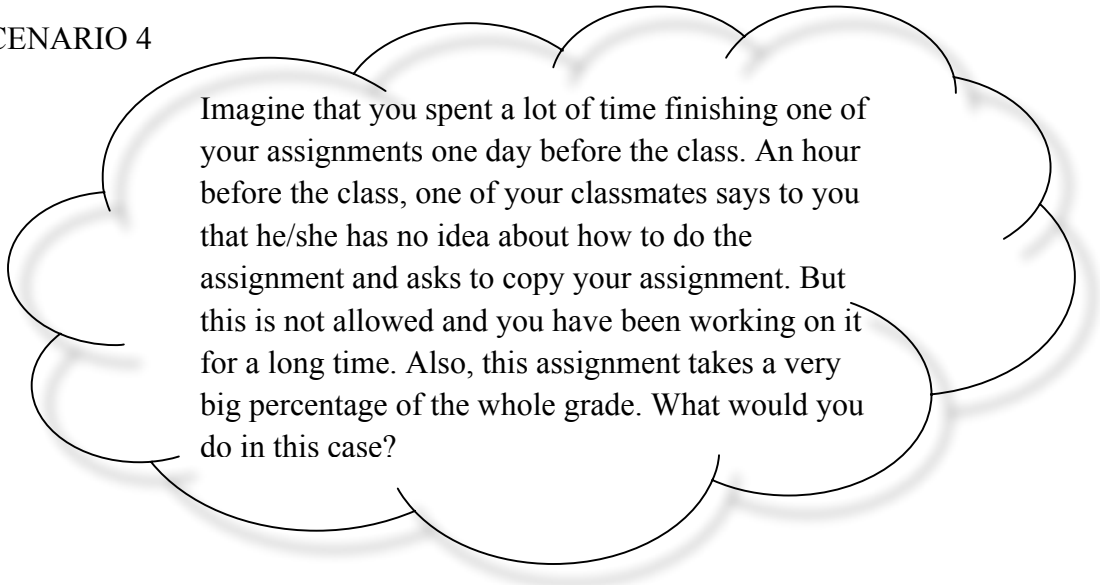
SCENARIO 3



1. ☐ Turn around and say, "Shh… Can you please quiet down?"
2. ☐ Turn around and say, "I can hardly hear what the professor says."
3. ☐ Complain to the professor.
4. ☐ Turn around and throw something like a paper ball at them.
5. ☐ Do nothing and tolerate the noise.
6. ☐ Other (Please specify in the space provided below.)

_____
_____
_____
_____

SCENARIO 4



1. ☐ Say to him/her, “No. Copying assignments is not allowed.”
2. ☐ Say to him/her, “Um…I am sorry, but I don’t feel comfortable giving you my assignment.”
3. ☐ Make a complaint to the professor.
4. ☐ Say to him/her, “Why don’t you ask the professor for help?”
5. ☐ Lie to him/her and say, “I haven’t finished either.”
6. ☐ Other (Please specify in the space provided below.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

VITA

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Major Professor: Dr. Krassimira Charkova